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Why A HOSPITAL SISTER?

By Rev. Dr. L. Rumble, M.S.C.

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Archiepiscopus Sancti Pauli

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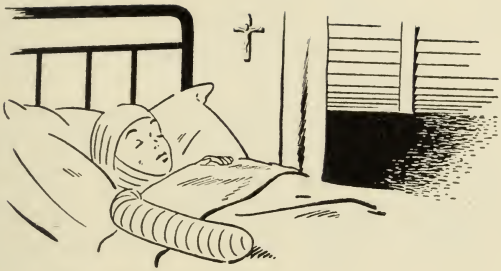


THE ABIDING TRAGEDY

"I think of tragedy upon the earth:
Bloodshed and war—the desperate hurt
and pain
That leave upon the world a darkening stain
To mar the heavenly heritage of birth. . . . .

Almighty Ruler of the universe
Hurl back this monstrous force of death
and ill,
Bring healing balm of peace and lost good
will."

Surely everyone will echo Maria Briscoe Croker's prayer for the abolition of war. But, alas, the cry of pain is never absent from this world. Wars come and go, adding to the miseries of humanity. But always there is suffer-

ing. It is part of our lives in this world. Much of it is man-made. But much of it is simply inevitable. All kinds of sickness and disease are ever with us, in times of peace as well as in times of war.

Take the TOTAL suffering here in America on any day you like to name. Go not only to the homes of rich and poor alike. Go to all the hospitals throughout the land. Try to see them all in a single glance. The total suffering comes to such a colossal sum that your imagination is quite unable to grasp it.

WHAT IS IT TO ME?

Oh, I know the thought that comes to you. You will say, "Don't try to imagine it. It's too distressing. We're not meant to think of it all like that. Everyone is not suffering all the pain. Each has his share. I haven't any now, though I suppose my turn will come. And it will be time enough to think about it then."

But do you notice how at once your thoughts have gone to YOURSELF? You will think about suffering when it comes to YOU! But others are suffering now; and we can't get away from the mute and wistful plea from all the stricken and the afflicted: "Have pity on me, have pity on me, at least you my

friends, for the hand of the Lord hath touched me." Job, XIX, 21.

LOST OPPORTUNITY

"That's just it", you will say. "For the hand of the Lord hath touched me! Why should God ever have permitted so much suffering. — or any suffering for that matter?"

But that can be a trap. Many people have fallen into it. Pilate fell into it when he took refuge in the question he thought could not be answered, "What is truth?" He made that the excuse for not acting as he should, and let Christ go to all the sufferings of His passion.

And you will fall into the trap, if you stop at the mystery of the pain of this world, and refuse the opportunity offered you by the sufferings of stricken humanity.

I COULD answer your question by saying that all the evils and misfortunes of this world are God's judgment on a sinful human race.

There's more to it than that, of course. But if I go on discussing the theory of it all, I myself will fall into the trap, and be side-tracked from my real purpose. For, however suffering be explained, I am concerned with the way in which God wants us to deal with it in practice.

SCHOOL FOR ALL

Ah! dear American girl, I do want you to see suffering as an opportunity. It is not only to be endured. It is to be understood and used. Have you ever thought of it as the possible occasion of endless glory? And not only for those whose turn it is to bear their share of the world's pain. They also make the most of it who hasten to the relief of suffering and pain and misery wherever they come upon it.

"Men have made the world what it is. Now its trials are to make them what they were meant to be." From such trials the sufferer may learn patience, whilst the sympathizer may learn charity. And a sufferer or a sympathizer in turn everyone is called upon to be. So the tragedies of life are the anvil on which God can hammer out heroism and sanctity in all.

"But", you will say, "there are hospitals!" Yes, there are. Never in any age has such provision been made for the relief of suffering and the healing of the sick. In big cities, in small country towns, throughout the length and breadth of the land, there are thousands of hospitals, with an army of doctors and nurses devoted to those afflicted with illnesses of every kind.

THERE ARE HOSPITALS!

But there is something sad about those hospitals. They are not good enough. There is something WRONG with them. It's not that they don't alleviate pain, and nurse people back to health and strength. They do. And for that we are indeed thankful to God. And no . . . I am not speaking of their facilities or equipment; nor of the skill of the doctors; nor of the devotedness of the nurses. Then what IS wrong with them? That we can't understand without going a long way back in history. DO LISTEN for a moment. It won't be dry, or hard, or long. It's a fascinating story. And it can be told very briefly.

THE GREAT PHYSICIAN

Do you remember how, many many years ago, Someone said, "They that are well need

not the physician, but they that are sick?" Our Lord, who spoke those words, after the preaching of the gospel, made His chief activity the healing of the sick, both in body and soul. Here is a typical passage from the gospels: "When evening was come, they brought to Him many . . . and all that were sick He healed, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet Isaias, saying: He took our infirmities, and bore our diseases." Matt., VIII, 16-17.

Then, too, He told His disciples not only to preach the gospel, but to heal the sick, and to cleanse the lepers. "Freely have ye received", He said, "freely give." Matt., X, 8. They were these words of the Great Physician which impelled the early Christians from the very beginning to manifest a special interest in the sick, and devotedness in caring for them. They did not believe that, because all Christians were not meant to heal the sick miraculously, they were not meant to do it at all! They regarded it as part of the mission of the Church

to care for the sick with all the natural skill and ability of which they were capable.

IN PAGAN ROME

Listen to what those early Christians used to do. In all the big cities to which they went, as soon as they were numerous enough, they used to look round for the needy, and the poor, and the afflicted, to lavish upon them the utmost attention and care. From the streets they gathered the sick, pagans and Christians alike, into their homes, to nurse them back to health. Or perhaps the sick would be taken to one of the larger homes of some well-to-do Christians; and others, living nearby, would attend daily to help in the work.

St. Jerome tells us that Fabiola, in Rome, would have as many as four hundred at once as guests in her household, counting nothing too much in her efforts to relieve their sufferings and heal their diseases.

So impressive was the example of such Christian charity that Julian the Apostate, in his efforts to stem the tide of conversions to the Church, tried to compete with the Christians by setting up public institutions for the care of the sick. He failed; and it is impor-

tant to notice why. In none of his State Hospitals could he duplicate the spirit of Christian charity. Paganism could not inspire it, and none of his paid professional attendants were capable of it.

THE AGES OF FAITH

You feel a sense of joy, don't you, dear American girl, just as every other Catholic, that Julian the Apostate failed in his efforts to destroy the Church? And you feel proud of the fact that the tradition of Christian charity prevailed through all the centuries that followed.

It is a great story, and a grand one, the story of the care of the poor and the needy and the sick in the Ages of Faith. Wherever the gospel was preached, those stricken with sorrow and afflicted with disease, found themselves the first to be sought out, and consoled, and assisted in every possible way.

When Monasteries were built, besides infirmaries for their own members who fell ill, hospitals were attached to them for externs to be nursed back to health by the brethren. Later, Religious Orders were established by good Christian women who undertook to devote themselves exclusively to the care of sufferers from all manner of disease. It was a

sight for the Angels to see so many in those ages of faith, women from all ranks of society, not only from the poorer families, but from the noble and wealthy, and even from royal households, forsaking a world whose prospects glittered before them, in order to be clothed in the Holy Habit of Religion.

And what did they seek? They sought to become nurses, but nurses consecrated to God. They sought to tend the sick, not from any mercenary motive but as a privilege, not with the proud condescension of the strong for the weak, but with the humility of servants, and with an almost infinite tenderness and reverence that astonished the patients themselves. Such were the hospitals the Catholic Church gave to Christendom in the Ages of Faith.

THE GREAT SECRET

Why did so many good women devote their whole lives to such work? What did they see that others do not see? What vision did they have that so few seem to have in these days? Have YOU ever tried to think that out? Would YOU like to see what they saw, and have the vision they had?

Holy Scripture tells us: "Blessed is the man that understandeth concerning the needy and the poor." Ps., XL, I. The needy and the poor,

you say! What is there to understand about them? We all know that they are always there. We meet them at every turn. We can't

escape the sight of their misery. What are we to understand concerning them beyond the fact that they exist, and are so numerous?

Dear American girl, here is the secret that so many have forgotten. And it is a very wonderful one. It is that God Himself, as far as you are concerned, identifies Himself with all who are in need, and whom you are able to help. He did so in the Old Law. He does so in the New Law. Describing the needy and the sick, Jesus spoke of our efforts to relieve them, saying: "Amen, I say to you, as long as

you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me." Matt., XXV, 40.

For all with the Christian Faith, then, the poor, the sick, the stricken and the afflicted, represent Christ in this world. In them, you may catch a glimpse of Him, and manifest your love for Him. "Do you wish to find Me?", He says to you. "Do you wish to touch Me with your hands, to offer Me consolation and grateful love? Then seek out the poor, the sick, the needy and the stricken, and care for them." And to how many of the Saints has He not revealed Himself in the poor broken creatures whose wounds they have dressed, and whose sufferings they have sought to alleviate for the love of Him!

This was the outlook in the Ages of Faith! This was the secret which gave to Christendom its multitude of hospitals staffed with angels of mercy in the garb of Religious Sisters wholly consecrated to God.

THE FALL FROM GRACE

Oh! How I wish I could tell you that things had continued like that! But, alas, so much of human history makes sad reading. In the sixteenth century, with the Protestant reformation, came disaster to a great part of Europe. And its unhappy results are visible to this day

throughout the English-speaking world, including our own America.

Multitudes drifted from the Faith of the Ages. But you know well what happened. Here I only wish to say that, when the Religious Orders were suppressed, hospitals were secularized, to become henceforth State Institutions, or commercial propositions. Professional nurses took the place of Religious Sisters consecrated to God, and supernatural charity degenerated into a merely human virtue on an infinitely lower plane.

THE NURSING PROFESSION

Please, gentle reader, do not mistake me. Not for a moment would I say a word against the nursing profession. The very thought to be a nurse comes only to big-hearted and generous girls. They are thinking of one of the noblest works possible to women. And it IS a life of self-sacrifice. No. Of nurses in general it must be said that they are generous and good women, of high ideals, full of compassion and benevolence. We all admire them.

But there is something better. Humanitarianism is not enough. Love of mankind without the love of God does not really "understand concerning the needy and the poor." It has lost the vision of Faith.

During the war, to cope with the shortage of nurses everywhere felt, government departments and the public hospitals had to advertise for trainees. The great need was for probationers and cadet nurses to fill the ranks of graduates who had been drafted overseas. So in the press, in streetcars, and in all public places, placards appeared, urging girls to volunteer for hospital training. A nurse was depicted, in her neat and attractive uniform, and the suggestion was offered to every girl whose eyes chanced to travel her way, "YOUR WARTIME OCCUPATION — YOUR PEACETIME PROFESSION." An occupation — something to do! A profession — a good way in which to earn your living! A good way — yes. No one would deny that. But surely, for the Christian heart, there is just something missing from such an appeal!

THE CATHOLIC SPIRIT

You understand, don't you, that the Catholic Church simply has to look higher than that! And can you wonder that, from the day

her hospitals were first confiscated and secularized, she set to work to establish her own hospitals all over again, staffing them once more with her consecrated Religious?

The Church COULD NOT renounce her mission to console the afflicted, to soften and relieve every form of misery and pain in the name of God, and for the love of God. And she felt that still she must do it by the gentlest and tenderest of agencies, through the touch of Christ in the hands of the Sister who is wholly dedicated to Him.

So in her own hospitals the Church surrounds the sick with the skill, the training, and all that proficiency demands, yes; but also with the purest and holiest form of pity and compassion which is to be found only in the hearts of those who belong solely to God. For what heart is more full of love than the heart empty of all love save the pure love of Him who is infinite goodness and mercy itself?

ANGELS IN UNIFORM

Yet do not think of the sister as but a "glorified nurse." She is first and foremost an APOSTLE. It may be that directly she cares for the bodily welfare of her patients. But well she knows that to care for the body only, to relieve its pain and restore it to health, is

but to postpone death, not to enable anyone to escape it. All must die eventually, and no life which ends is really very long.

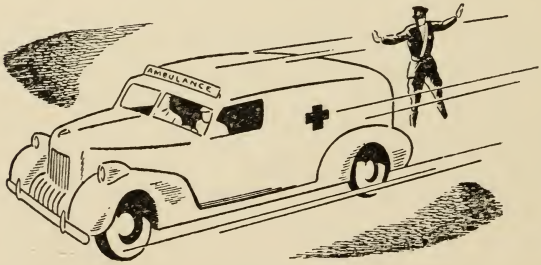
No. It is eternal life that is the important thing, and with that life each sister feels she is chiefly concerned. Zeal for souls is never absent from her thoughts. And prayer in her heart accompanies every deft touch of her hands as she attends to each patient in turn.

And oh!, how RICH are her opportunities for her spiritual work! We all know that illness can be a time of great blessings. With many more men and women than with a St. Ignatius it has proved the turning point in a human life. And the good sister not only preaches the eternal and spiritual by what she is. Choosing the right moment, she speaks the words of Life her Divine Master Himself puts upon her lips. They are words their very gratitude makes her patients willing to hear. Their enforced idleness gives them time to reflect on her plea. And they know that she is thinking only of their own spiritual good.

Tell me, dear girl, you who are reading this, were you to search the whole world, do you really think you could find a vocation for women with more scope for good, and a more direct influence upon souls?

HEAVENLY SYMPATHY

It would take volumes to tell you all that our Catholic hospitals mean in this world. They have an atmosphere all their own. The grace of God seems to pervade their very corridors and wards. And heaven bends down to earth over each bed of pain. Try to picture



the scene. Smashed in an accident, some poor man is brought in unconscious from the streets. He regains his senses. His broken limbs have been set. His wounds have been washed and bandaged. And as he opens his eyes, he sees bending over him to reassure him

that highest, noblest, and grandest of the daughters of the Catholic Church, the nurse who is a sister.

Looking upon her mild and placid face, modest and veiled, yet radiating the peace of God, he thinks she is of heaven rather than of earth. There steals over him all the warmth of the charity of Christ which is the business and purpose of her life, the sign and the seal of her union with Him. And he ranks her with the Angels themselves.

Oh! If you or I were tomorrow stricken down and afflicted, what hand would we wish to dress our wounds and soothe our pain, if not the hand of the Sister who is consecrated to Christ? From what lips would we wish to hear words of consolation and reassurance, if not from those that speak to us only in the name of His Infinite Love?

But could not YOU be to others what it would all mean to yourself? Could not your hands be dispensing the blessings of Christ, and your words speak the message of His Infinite Love? Do think this over. Don't dismiss the thought too easily. Thousands in bodily pain and spiritual danger are wistfully appealing to YOU. . . .

WHAT IT MEANS

Listen, dear girl, to something of what it all means. There is not a Catholic hospital in America, and there are nearly seven hundred such hospitals, that could not give you an unending list of almost miraculous graces conferred by God upon patients entrusted to their care.

Even though not converted to the Faith, thousands of prejudiced people have gone from these hospitals, determined never to credit or speak a word against the Catholic religion again. Already that is a blessing indeed. But there ARE converts. One after another, continuously, non-Catholics of good-will have received the gift of Faith owing to the example and influence of the Sisters who nursed them. And still more numerous are the careless Catholics who have returned to the practice of their religion, to live henceforth lives not only blameless, but edifying to all.

But there is another aspect to which people do not always advert. It is a sad fact that, outside the Catholic Church, there is a great driftage from religion, and from respect for the moral law. And, as in so many other fields, the standard of medical ethics has suffered a deplorable decline. This is a difficult matter of which to speak, but I can say this much. In

religionless hospitals many operations are performed without scruple which are opposed to the Law of God. By some of these operations lives of little children are destroyed, nearly half a million yearly in America alone, as though "Thou shalt not kill" had never been proclaimed as a Divine Command. Thousands upon thousands of souls are sent to eternity without baptism. And innumerable Catholics die without the Sacraments who, had they been with our own, would surely have made their peace with God before going from this world to Him.

Who can think of these things, and not thank God for our Catholic hospitals, where the observance of God's Law and the welfare of souls are given their rightful place in so vital a service to humanity?

But it is not enough to admire their work. It is not enough to thank God for our hospitals. We need more of them. And even for those already established we badly need more Sisters, not only to expand their work, but even to maintain what they are doing.

Those last words make you ask, "Do you really mean that?" Alas, I do. I wish I didn't have to say it. But already the lack of vocations is making itself felt in the Religious Orders devoted to nursing the sick. One cannot but wonder whether the quality of faith, the

spirit of religion, the charity of Christ, or even natural generosity, is less in the American Catholic girl of today than in the past. And you have to agree that to admit it would indeed be to our shame.

IF ONLY YOU THOUGHT!

How many great decisions have depended on an "IF"! "If I had known that", people say, "I would have chosen very differently."

And you, dear American girl, "IF" you had known all that I have put before you, would you not have asked yourself long ere this, again and again, whether you could not take your place in the ranks of the nursing Sisters who are doing so much good for God and for souls?

But I know all the other "IFS" that swarm into your mind the moment such a question is put to you. "It means not only being a nurse", you will think; "it means also being a sister." If ONLY you thought you would like nursing; if ONLY you thought you had a vocation for Religious Life; if ONLY you thought it would not all be too hard; and if ONLY you thought you would persevere; ah! THEN, of course, you would not hesitate. But you don't feel at all sure of yourself.

Perhaps another bright thought comes. You are a Catholic. You have the Faith. And you do love Our Lord. Well, couldn't you just become a nurse without being a sister? You could be true to your Catholic principles. You could intend all you do to be for the love of God. You could be of great spiritual help to souls.

Well, yes. You could do all that. Whether you would is another matter. But, in any case, you could do SO MUCH MORE as a sister. There would be an infinitely greater blessing upon your work. With your Religious Vocation immense privileges would come into your life, both for this world and the next. And, by your membership of the Order you join, you make the Church herself stronger in her mission of mercy to mankind. Why be content with so much LESS, when so much MORE is possible to you?

BUT WHAT OF THE VOWS?

Did I hear you sigh? It is such a BIG thing, you say, to consecrate all that one is and all that one has to the service of Christ in the sick and the needy and the poor, not for a day, not for a year, but for the rest of one's life on earth! There I agree with you. It IS a big thing. But Our Lord is worth it. No one else

is. But He is. And He will reward you magnificently for such a generous choice.

Oh! You don't doubt that, you think. But you don't know whether YOU could manage it. Sisters vow poverty, chastity, and obedience for life. It seems to be goodbye to all liberty and romance.

But, dear girl, do listen to the thousands of sisters who have made those vows. Ask them if it has meant goodbye to all liberty and romance! Liberty and romance as the world understands those things, that I grant you. But the sisters have found another liberty and another romance far more glorious and absorbing than any to be found in the world they have abandoned.

You see, sisters don't want to drive God from their hearts by earthly attachments; so they vow poverty. They don't want to give themselves to any lesser love than His; so they vow chastity. They don't want to depart in any way from His Holy Will; so they vow obedience. And instead of finding their Convent a dark prison, and themselves shackled by chains, as a credulous and unbelieving world imagines, they find themselves in a life flood-

lit with the brightness of God's Presence, in a veritable palace of God's grace, and enjoying the very fulness of the liberty of the Saints.

Never was there a greater mistake than that of those who think of a religious vocation in terms of separation and sacrifice, renunciation and death, forgetting that it is not a death, but a life; not a sacrifice and renunciation, but an inheritance; not a separation, but a union—a union with Him apart from whom there is no happiness for anybody forever.

THE THOUGHT OF MARRIAGE

But is it not natural for a girl to dream of human romance and marriage? It is. And human love is undoubtedly a glorious gift, whilst children in whom parents live over again are amongst the most beautiful things in life.

Yet don't let your heart run away with your head. Glorious dreams can so easily outstrip reality. Marriage, like any other state in life, settles down to a grim duty in the end. There is no state of unalloyed pleasure possible in this world. Every human love is more or less selfish. It can't remain at high-water mark always. And responsibilities have to be faced—anxieties over temporal affairs; suffer-

ing and worry in the upbringing of children; and spiritual dangers that disturb and distress.

These thoughts occur to any person who reflects. Some few years ago, a group of girls belonging to the Sodality of the Children of Mary attended a Religious Profession ceremony. One of their former fellow members had just made her vows as a sister. Talking amongst themselves about it afterwards, one of the girls said, "Isn't she brave!" "I don't know", replied another, rather thoughtfully. "I was at a wedding last week, and I was wondering what the future of that girl will be. This one today knows at least to whom she has vowed her life. Our Lord will never disappoint her! I'm sure the girl who marries risks her happiness far more than the one who becomes a sister."

WHERE THE SACRIFICE?

Then, you will say, there's more self-sacrifice in marriage than in a religious vocation. It is there one must look for the heroic! But there is one thing to remember. Have not you yourself said that it is natural for a girl to dream of romance? That ever remains true. Despite the trials and responsibilities of marriage, the pleasures of human love and affection, with all their tender exchanges, are very

real pleasures dear to the human heart. And joy in the prospect of one's own little children is a very hard thing to renounce.

Believe me, Our Lord knew the self-sacrifice it would mean to renounce those very natural longings for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. For that reason, to those who would make such a choice, He promised compensating blessings and consolations a hundred-fold in this life, and a far higher degree of heavenly glory in the next.

No. We do not say that it is natural to choose to be a sister. One needs faith for that, and to be moved by heavenly hopes, and a great love of Our Lord, and of the souls for whom He died. But there is no Catholic girl in whom faith, and hope, and charity were not implanted by her baptism; and there is no Catholic girl in whom all three could not inspire the desire to be a sister in response to the thoughts in these pages, and with the help of her own prayers.

HAVE YOU THE VOCATION?

To all this you may say that you have never felt any vocation from God calling YOU in particular to such a life. But what do you understand by vocation? It is certainly not something that need be FELT. I do not deny

that there are those who feel strongly drawn to spiritual realities, and who experience an ever-growing distaste for the things of the world. But the reality of a vocation does not depend upon such experiences as these.

Let me make a suggestion. It's really a simple test. Just check over these few necessary questions:

> Have you the Catholic Faith?
>
> Have you ordinary health and strength?
>
> Would you be free to become a sister, if you really wanted to do so?
>
> Would you welcome the thought of being better able to sanctify your own soul, to save other souls, and to serve God, than you could do in any other way?
>
> Would you like to have the special graces and the special happiness Our Lord has promised to all those who thus give themselves to Him?

If to these questions you find a yes in your heart, then you have but to apply to the Superiors of any Religious Order you please, and if they accept you, the vocation is there. For

it is God who gave you the gifts you possess. It is God who disposed you to welcome such thoughts. It is God who accepts you through the Superiors you approach. It is God who has called you to be a sister.

YOU STILL HESITATE?

It doesn't sound so difficult, does it? But still you have misgivings. I know them. Don't think you are the only one who has ever had to fight her way through them. What important decision has anyone ever made without having had to face a host of imagined difficulties? And, believe me, the choice we have been considering IS important. Oh! I feel that, you will say. But . . . . and the rush of objections is upon you!

• YOU ARE NOT GOOD ENOUGH?

But if that were reason enough to abandon the thought, there is not a sister in Religious Life today who would not tell you that she should not be there! We enter Religion to become good, not because we are saints before we begin. And it is within Religious Life that you will have helps towards the love of God and growth in virtue that cannot be got elsewhere.

• YOU FEEL NO ATTRACTION?

That is not necessary, as we have seen. Your Faith tells you that it is nobler to be a sister consecrated to God than to remain in the world. You can see that thus you would have greater opportunities for good. And you have a will that you can use for the decision required. If you do your part, God will do the rest. From the moment you really accept the thought of such a vocation, a great love for it will begin to develop within you, and intensify with the years as you go on in the service of God.

• YOU DON'T THINK YOU COULD?

You are judging yourself as you are now, without the necessary training. The nurse who begins as a probationer in any hospital feels that she couldn't assist at a major operation. And she couldn't then. Nor would she be allowed. But the day will come when she will be fit for all duties. And for the duties of the sister amongst the Professed Religious a similar period of training is prescribed. At least six months as a postulant, and twelve months as a novice precede any taking of vows. And you could be both a good nurse and a good sister, if you entered

into your preparation for the twofold vocation with good will.

- YOU CAN'T LEAVE HOME?

Just think for a moment. Isn't it strange that this plea is hardly ever urged save when it is a question of entering upon the Religious Life? If a girl marries, she leaves home. And neither she nor her parents urge that as an objection to her prospective wedding. A lucrative position would take her away from home, and no word of protest is heard. Her career in this world must come before all. But the call of God is another matter. Then it is that this objection is urged. Is it not a shame that such a protest should come from Christian lips? At the age of twelve Our Lord Himself taught us what our attitude should be. "Did you not know", He said to His Mother, "that I must be about My Father's business?" Only for God, your parents would not be your parents. Only for God, you would not be their child. And if God wants you, they should be as happy to yield as you should be to give yourself to Him. Then, too, if there is one thing certain, it is that you will bring greater blessings upon them by your life and prayers as a Religious than ever you could do by remaining with them

- YOU MAY NOT PERSEVERE?

But surely that excuse would forbid you to try anything! No sister has ever entered the Convent with absolute certainty that she would persevere! Even if you did not persevere, it is more glorious to have had the courage to try and to have failed, than not to have had the courage to try. But let the future look after itself. Or, rather, entrust it to God. It is His work as well as yours, and if you do your part, He will most certainly do His. In the years to come you will look back and smile at all the timid fears with which you took the step to a never-ending consolation and peace.

WILL IT BE THAT?

Consolation and peace, you say. But will it be that? Well, perhaps, not as you are thinking of them just now. For we do tend to think of consolation and peace as meaning a comfortable life, undisturbed by difficulties, don't we? And it would be wrong to pretend that Religious Life is a state in which one can escape all trials. As we said before, there is no state of life in this world where that is possible. That is why Our Lord said, "Not as the world gives peace do I give peace; but My

peace I give unto you." His peace is peace of soul in the midst of such trials as life on earth inevitably brings.

But I'll tell you what will be yours, if you choose to give your life to God as a sister. You will find a happiness and a joy no earthly pleasures can ever create within a human soul. You will find yourself caring so much for Our Lord that you care for yourself scarcely at all. And that means that your constant delight will be the fulfillment of His Holy Will, and you won't even bother seeking for happiness in anything else. You will find yourself agreeing wholeheartedly with that wonderful sister, Mother Janet Erskine Stuart, "If God has given you a vocation, He has looked through all His treasures, and given you the very best." Opportunities for your own sanctification will be all around you. Religious Life is full of helps. And the peace of Christ is the atmosphere it creates throughout the whole of the Convent, and within the heart of each privileged sister.

IS IT SELF-SEEKING?

After hearing of all those inducements, you may feel inclined to say that even one who becomes a sister has very mercenary motives. But that is not so. If a girl marries a man

whom she does not love, and merely because he happens to be wealthy, you would rightly accuse her of mercenary motives. But if she marries a man whom she sincerely loves, and who just happens to be wealthy, you could not accuse her of mercenary motives. The choice

would be simply fortunate for her, and no one would grudge to her the joy of its additional advantages.

Now, on a far loftier plane, the same thing is true of Religious Life. I have been explaining to you simply what WILL happen, if you enter for the love of Our Lord. Were one to enter for the sake of His gifts, but without any real love of Him (which no one would be likely to do), that would indeed be mercenary.

But to enter for the love of Our Lord, and to rejoice in the gifts and graces He has prepared for those who do this, is quite another thing. That is not entering for the love of yourself. And you yourself must realize that it would be no tribute to Him to despise what He wishes to lavish on those He loves most!

You will be happy, yes; but your happiness in His gifts will really be happiness in His love for you. And His love for you, in turn will be the reward of your love for Him even to the forgetfulness of self.

But surely the answer to your difficulty can be given in a few simple words. For the self-giving of your life as a sister consecrated to God, and utterly devoted to the welfare of the sick and the needy and the poor would be the very opposite of the self-seeking which is troubling your thoughts.

NO GREATER LOVE

Dear girl, the motto of your whole life as a sister would be Our Lord's very own words, "Greater love no man has than that he lay down his life for his friend." Greater love means, not saving one's life, but spending it to the utmost, pouring it out for God.

You won't, of course, have to pour the whole chalice of it out at once in martyrdom. But you will pour it out drop by drop as it is wanted. The sister who is a nurse is called upon to follow Christ, not in the colossal, austere, frightening virtues, but in the winning ones, pleasant, kindly, merciful, patient, faithful, reliable, full of compassion and charity. These are not so cheap as they seem. They are wonderful, because all that they want to do is to GIVE.

Called to the bedside of the sick, whether in the hospital ward or anywhere else, each Sister says gently in the spirit of Our Lord's reply to the centurion's appeal on behalf of his servant who was ill, "I will come and heal him."

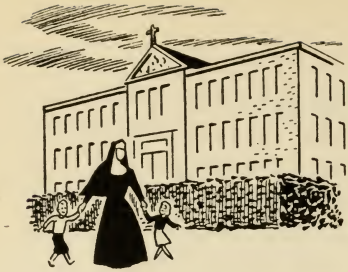
And she knows that some day she will see all whom she consoled, whose drooping heads she lifted day by day, whose pain she soothed, whose wounds she dressed, whose souls she drew to new desires of the Light and Love, the Beauty and the Glory that is Christ — some day she will see them all again. Jesus Himself will call them all before her. "Do you recognize them?" He will ask. Yet "in as much as you did it to the least of these, you did it to me!"

THE GREAT NEED TODAY

We commenced this little book by saying that the cry of pain is never absent from this world. And you, dear girl, would not be YOU if that cry awakened no answering echo of sympathy in the depths of your soul. You are not insensitive to it. How often you have suffered in the suffering of others, and felt that you could not know happiness until you had relieved their distress! It was this spirit that wrung from the heart of Cardinal Manning the protesting cry, "A child's needless tear is a blood-blot on the earth." Think, then, dear American girl, of all the pain and suffering, affliction and misery, you could alleviate did you devote your life to this work.

But think, too, of this. In every age the Church has had to endure the opposition of bitter enemies. These enemies have reviled and slandered her, teaching their children to dread and fear her. And widespread indeed are the prejudices against her amongst multitudes even here in America. The minds of millions are set for resistance to all our arguments on behalf of the Catholic religion. And yet . . . not to them all.

There is one argument that first reduces enemies to respectful silence; then moves them to admiration; and finally results in the



conversion of many amongst them. That argument is the devotion of the Catholic Church to works of charity. Men cannot resist the evidence of the spirit of Christ when the Church quietly directs their attention to her hospitals for the sick, her orphanages for destitute children, her homes for the aged and the dying, her hostels for wayfarers and those suffering any kind of distress—all made possible by the good sisters who have taken Our Lord seriously, imitating Him who said, "I have come, not to be served, but to serve, and to give My life for many." Clothed in the holy habit of Religion, these good sisters have gone forth in the name of the Catholic Church, to spend themselves and be spent in the service of Christ, whom they have sought and found in the persons of the needy and the poor.

By becoming a Religious you, too, would dispense the charity of Christ officially in the name of the Catholic Church. Though I have spoken chiefly of hospitals and of nursing in this booklet, it does not matter in what great work of mercy you might be engaged. If nursing does not appeal, still there is wide

scope for your energies in many other welfare activities of the Church. But just be a sister, full of love for God, doing good for mankind wherever you may, and YOU become the living refutation of the enemies of Christ, a living invitation to the haven of Truth, a light shining before men that they may learn the things that are to their peace.

AN UNBEARABLE THOUGHT

In this age, more than ever, the Church must impress a religionless world. Would it not, then, be an unbearable thought that, for want of vocations, the Church should have to restrict rather than to extend an aspect of her mission to mankind which of all others is most likely to appeal? One with ANY love for Our Lord, with ANY zeal for the welfare of souls, would find that a sad thought indeed. And you, dear girl, what of YOURSELF?

Yes. There are thousands of good sisters throughout the country devoting themselves to this glorious work today. But there are also thousands of good Catholic girls who could join them, and work with them, and carry on the grand apostolate of mercy and charity after them, were they not deaf to the call that is there for them to hear, blind to the vision that is there for them to see!

And why have I written this booklet, if not to help you to hear that call, and to see that vision, so precious in the sight of God, so useful to the Church, so full of consolation for others, so rich in blessings for yourself!

Oh! Think it over, and pray about it. Don't let it be said that there were too few here in America with the faith, the charity, the nobility and generosity, to make so glorious a choice.

We plead with the Holy Spirit, saying, "Thou shalt renew the face of the earth." But He relies on our cooperation, and does it through generous souls. Perhaps, even now, Our Lord is saying to you, as to the woman at the well, "Give Me to drink", seeking a consolation you COULD give Him. Yield to His plea, if indeed He thus speaks within your heart. He must not be disappointed, as He was with the city which did not know the time of its visitation, and over which He wept. No. Be listening for His voice, ready like St. Paul with your response —

"Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

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